

Bright ray of hope for intellectually disabled

Guy Rogers

rogers@theherald.co.za

Four years after breaking ground, the R92.4m development of a special school in Kariega has been completed.

Sunshine Special School in the potholed Durban Street has been transformed from just a handful of prefabricated classrooms and a hired hall to a first-class all-in-one facility including 24 new classrooms, a library/media centre, a dining room and a hydrotherapy pool.

Basic education deputy minister Reginah Mhaule and Eastern Cape education MEC Fundile Gade attended the opening of the school yesterday and were given a tour by proud principal Magdalene George.

"Everything has been specially designed to enhance our teaching and the experience of the learners — from the software in our media centre to the outdoor gym in our courtyard," George said.

She said the new school also included a hall, 60 toilets, five offices and 364 metres of security fencing.

"There is a speech therapy

area that includes a sound-proof booth and equipment for audiometric testing, a physiotherapy area and a hydrotherapy pool for muscle strengthening.

"We emphasise preparing our learners for the real world so we have classes for hair-dressing, woodwork, needlework and arts and crafts.

"Our staff are passionate and routine is very important.

"This amazing new infrastructure makes the job of teaching and learning much easier and more fun."

George said Sunshine catered for severely intellectually disabled pupils from six to 18 years old.

"We are one of two schools of this kind in the Kariega, KwaNobuhle, Despatch area and we cater to all communities — the severe intellectual disability is our only criteria."

Gade said funding to manage the Eastern Cape schools' infrastructure programme was derived primarily from the education infrastructure grant.

In the 2020/2021 financial year ending in March 2021, this amounted to R1.544bn, which was a decrease of 0.8% from

the previous year.

"The preliminary allocation for the 2021/2022 financial year is R1.64bn.

"To our people this may sound like a huge amount of money," Gade said.

"However, considering the province's ongoing backlogs, which require close to R82.3bn to eradicate, it is but a drop in the ocean."

Mhaule said close to 100% of SA youngsters between the ages of seven and 15 without disabilities were now attending school.

"For those with disabilities, which is approximately 4% of the school-aged population, the participation rate ranges between 85% and 95% depending on the province.

"So there remain gaps in this sector but our mission is to eliminate the distinction be-

tween information-rich schools and information-poor schools, between schools for the disabled and abled and the income differential between rural poor and affluent urban schools."

She said she was happy with what she had seen at the school.

"Newly rebuilt Sunshine Special School meets the norms and standards of restoring hope and dignity to our learners and schooling communities.

"It is us who must adapt our understanding of common humanity, learn the richness of how human life is diverse, and recognise the presence of disability in our human midst as an enrichment of our diversity.

"Our job as the department is to provide the ability to overcome disability."



NEW HOPE: Taking a closer look at the revamped Sunshine Special School yesterday are, from left, basic education deputy minister Reginah Mhaule, Eastern Cape education MEC Fundile Gade, provincial education department head Dr Naledi Mabude, provincial legislature speaker Mlibo Qoboshiyane and Eastern Cape MPL Mzokeli Mrara

Picture: GUY ROGERS



SPICK AND SPAN: One of the new classrooms at Sunshine Special School in Kariega



FITNESS FEATURES: The Sunshine Special School has physiotherapy and hydrotherapy facilities



SPLASH OF COLOUR: The Sunshine Special School courtyard includes a jungle gym